

FROM THE COVER



Photos by Billy Calzada / Staff photographer
About 200 people celebrated All Souls Day Mass, led by San Antonio Archbishop Gustavo Garcia-Siller, on Tuesday at San Fernando Cemetery II.

MEMORIES

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after they learned that their daughter might die. The young family was hoping God would give them mercy.

The three were among the families who came to San Fernando Cemetery II on Tuesday morning to spruce up graves and pay respects.

By mid-morning, about 200 people were there celebrating All Souls Day Mass, led by San Antonio Archbishop Gustavo Garcia-Siller.

The crowd dispersed across the cemetery afterward, families gathering at various gravesites.

Visiting the cemetery is part of Stephanie Torres' daily routine. Every morning Torres, 37, tends to the graves of her grandmother, Juanita Vazquez, and uncles Hector Colon and Juan Vazquez. Juanita Vazquez is the most recent addition to that group. She died of COVID-19 last year, just one day after her 80th birthday.

A fold-out chair is among the flowers and decorations that adorn Juanita Vazquez's grave. Torres

"Today really means a lot to me. ... I'm going to talk to her and catch up."

Bianca Hernandez, whose child died in 2015

said it is for Lorenzo Vazquez, 86, who just had knee surgery but still visits his late wife every morning and afternoon.

Juanita Vazquez left a hole in the family that looms especially large this time of year as her loved ones carry on the Dia de los Muertos traditions that Vazquez always oversaw.

For one, the family continues to set up an altar in Juanita and Lorenzo Vazquez's home for the holiday. Juanita Vazquez would put flowers on graves that lacked decorations, so leading up to Dia de los Muertos, Torres and her three small children put silk flowers at dozens of graves that surround Vazquez's.

Torres said her 8-year-old daughter, Samantha Perez, had a birthday close to Juanita Vazquez's, so the two used to celebrate all week long.

"She says she wants grandma to look down and see all the flowers," Torres said.

Dia de los Muertos is becoming more of a tradition for Heber Guajardo Jr. and his family.

Tuesday, he and six relatives joined together under a canopy at the gravesites of his father, Heber Guajardo, and his 19-year-old son, Matthew Guajardo. They visit the site several times throughout the year.

The family gathered around a fold-out table in their lawn chairs. The group had tacos and pan de muerto — Day of the Dead bread. But early in the afternoon, Guajardo Jr., 54, said he'd be making a trip to get his late son hot wings — one of his favorite foods.

This year's holiday has been particularly painful for Guajardo Jr. It's the first since Matthew lost his three-year battle with leukemia earlier this year.

"But he's with God now," Guajardo Jr. said. "After the Mass today, I feel a little bit more at ease, a little more content that he's with God."

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Bianca Hernandez, right, and her children, Autumn, left, and Daphnee, visit the grave of daughter and sister Mercy at San Fernando Cemetery II.

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